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## Second annual report of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force

### Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Economic and Social Council the second annual report of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, as requested in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2001/7) prepared as a follow-up to Council resolution 2000/29.

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# Second annual report of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force

*Summary*

In its second year, the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, through its core activities, working groups, and regional nodes, successfully served as a multi-stakeholder mechanism to facilitate and promote collaborative initiatives at the regional, subregional and national levels and to mobilize new public and private resources to support information and communication technologies (ICT)-for-development programmes and projects. The Task Force facilitated the pooling of relevant experience of both developed and developing countries and the sharing of lessons learned in introducing and promoting ICT.

Its ability to leverage extensive networks and to develop new models of collaboration to advance the global effort to bridge the digital divide and foster digital opportunity has established the Task Force as an effective and influential platform to mobilize worldwide support and action to harness the potential of ICT for the objective of attaining the Millennium Development Goals. The Task Force was instrumental in placing development at the centre of the outcomes of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva. It will continue to pursue a focused strategy to build upon its demonstrated success.

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# I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in response to the mandate contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/29 of 28 July 2000 on an information and communication technologies task force, in which the Council endorsed the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics contained in the annex to that resolution. By its decision 2001/210 of 13 March 2001 on the establishment of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force, the Council requested the Secretary-General to undertake the necessary steps to establish the Task Force as recommended in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2001/7), paragraph 35 of which states that the Secretary-General will report annually to the Economic and Social Council on the work of the Task Force. The first annual report of the Task Force (E/2003/56 of 28 April 2003) was submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its Substantive Session of 2003. The Council welcomed the achievements of the Task Force, its orientation towards the use of ICT in the advancement of the development goals of the Millennium Declaration, its support of the preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society and its work, including through its regional networks and working groups and regional nodes, on ICT issues.

2. The present report covers the period from December 2002 to February 2004. It provides a brief overview of the environment in which the Task Force operated, presents an outline of its major activities and accomplishments, and gives an assessment of progress made over the second year, as well as an outline of a strategy until the end of 2005.

# II. The dynamics of the digital divide[1]

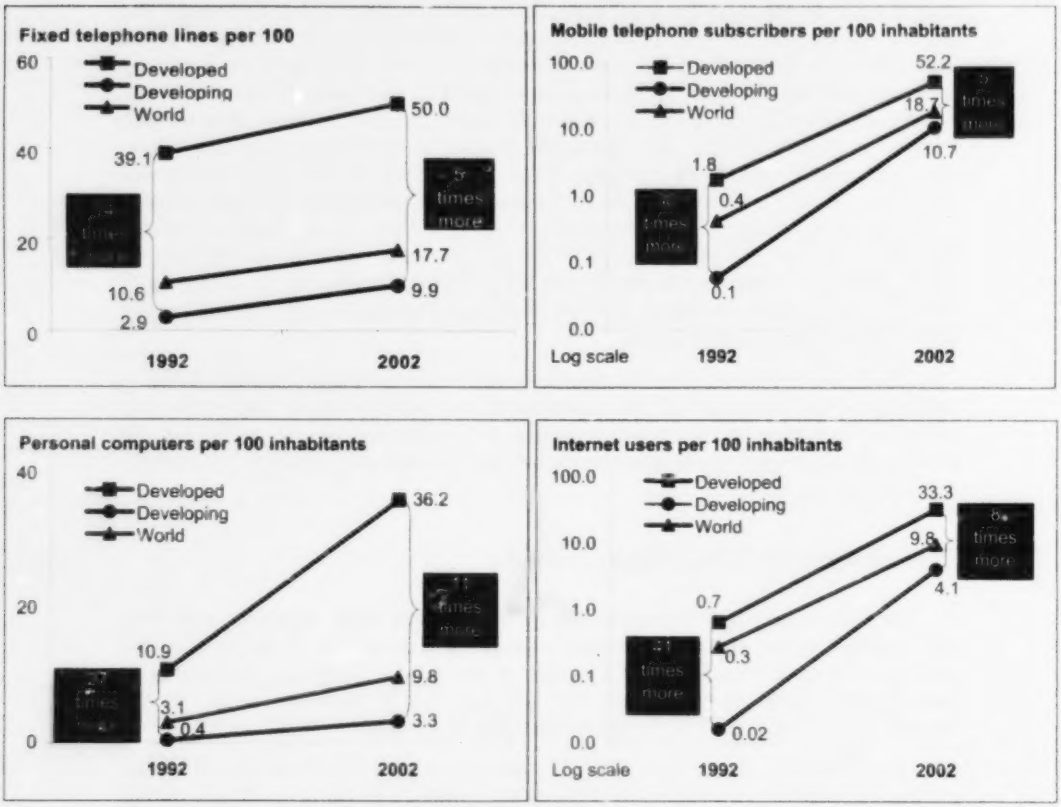
3. In recent years, as information and communication technologies have become the backbone of the global information economy and given rise to the information society, more attention has been focused on the gap in access to ICTs between developed and developing countries. This gap has come to be known as the "digital divide". But how big is it? Is the gap widening or narrowing?

4. One relevant way of measuring the gap in access to ICTs is to look at the differences between developed and developing countries in the level of penetration of different ICT services (telephone, mobile phone, Internet) and of personal computers, over the course of the past decade. As the graphs in figure 1 show, the gap has narrowed markedly, with particularly rapid progress in the field of mobile phone and Internet use.

5. It is notable that the average level of Internet penetration and mobile phone penetration in the developing world in 2002 (4.1 Internet users and 10.7 mobile phones per 100 inhabitants) was equivalent to the level reached in the developed countries around five years earlier. By contrast, the average level of fixed-line penetration in developing countries at the end of 2002 (just under one in every 10 inhabitants) was reached in the developed world as long ago as the 1960s.

Figure 1
**The shrinking divide**

**Distribution of fixed and mobile telephone subscribers, personal computers and Internet users per 100 inhabitants, by economic grouping, 1992 and 2002**




*Source*: *ITU World Telecommunication Development Report 2003: Access Indicators for the Information Society.*

*Note*: Developed refers to Western Europe, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. Developing refers to all other countries.

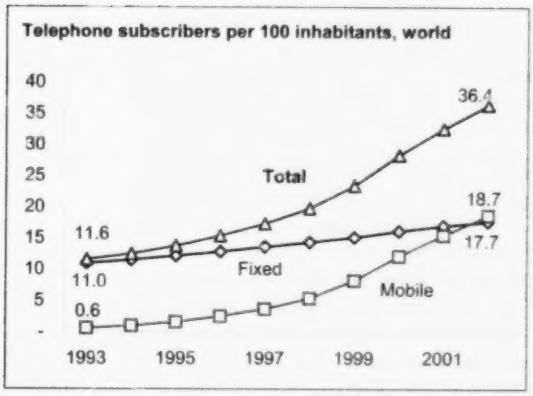
6. What this suggests is that the process of "catch-up" is occurring much more rapidly among newer services than is the case for older ones. But it also suggests that the developing world's strongly expressed preference for mobile phones over fixed-line ones is likely to put the brakes on Internet development in the near future. That is because the vast majority of the world's Internet users still use copper-based fixed-line technologies (e.g., dial-up, Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), cable modems) to access the Internet. Internet access from wireless devices is certainly possible (e.g. through so-called "third generation" mobile phones or through wireless local area networks (LANs)), but it is still quite expensive and, in the case of wireless LANs, has only limited range. These

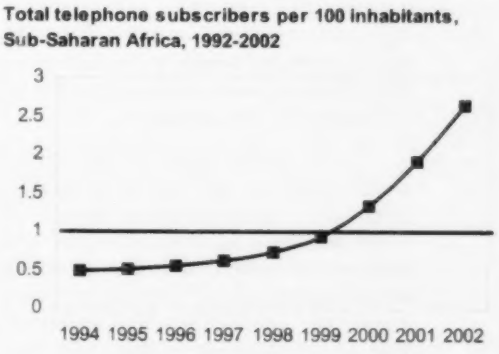
constraints are solvable, but there may well be a period of years during which the further development of the Internet in some developing regions of the world is slowed by the absence of a dense copper-based network.

7. The converging trends in ICTs worldwide have come about in large part owing to changes within the past few years. 2002 was the first year in which the number of mobile phones overtook fixed-lines worldwide (see figure 2, left chart). Africa was the first region where this took place and the impact has been most profound in sub-Saharan Africa. Several countries of the region, including Uganda and the Democratic People's Republic of the Congo, have levels of mobile phone penetration that are up to 10 times higher than fixed-line penetration. As figure 2, right chart, shows, 2000 was a turning point in Africa's telecommunications history as the psychological threshold of one user per 100 inhabitants was crossed. In the first few years of the new century, more Africans have become telecommunication users than in the hundred years of the previous century.

Figure 2
**Leaping ahead**

**Trends in total teledensity, worldwide, 1993-2002 and in sub-Saharan Africa, 1992-2002**



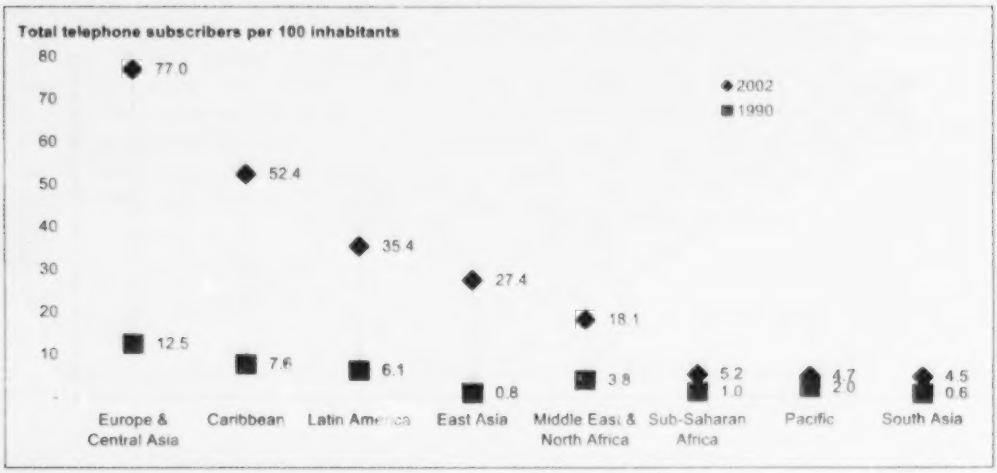




*Source*: ITU World Telecommunication Indicators Database.
*Note*: Total teledensity is the combined number of fixed lines and mobile phones per 100 inhabitants.

8. As shown in figure 3, in all of the developing subregions of the world fixed and mobile telephone networks have grown at a faster rate since 1990 than before that date. In the exceptional case of East Asia (which includes China), the total number of fixed and mobile subscribers per 100 inhabitants (i.e. total teledensity) in 2002 was more than 35 times higher than in 1990. In all cases, except in the developing Pacific, total teledensity was at least five times higher in 2002 than it was in 1990.

Figure 3
**A decade of ICT progress**

**Total teledensity (main telephone lines and mobile users per 100 inhabitants), in 1990 and 2002, in developing regions**




*Source*: ITU World Telecommunication Indicators Database.

*Note*: Developed countries are excluded. For definitions of regions, see: www.worldbank.org/data/countryclass/classgroups.htm.

9. In the 1990s, Africa was the main focus of United Nations system attempts to eradicate poverty and to raise living standards. The problems of that region continue to dominate the development agenda. But there is a danger that other parts of the world may be overlooked. As figure 3 shows, the problems of the digital divide are also evident in South Asia and, especially, among the small island developing States of the Pacific, which have so far failed to benefit from the information age. The Pacific has slipped from fifth place to seventh place in terms of total teledensity. Part of the problem is that, with small domestic markets, the introduction of competing mobile operators has not always been viable. These countries have also suffered from the decrease in settlement payments from international voice traffic that helped them overcome the problems of isolation and lack of economies of scale.

10. The digital divide is shifting, and the focus of development efforts must change with it. The successful conclusion of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003, provides a fresh impetus for international efforts to address the digital divide. Those efforts must concentrate on those areas of the world that are not yet benefiting from growth (such as the Pacific) and on those technologies where the catch-up process is proving slow (principally the fixed-line network). In those areas where the digital divide is already narrowing (such as in East Asia), and where developing countries are already leapfrogging ahead (for instance, in mobile communications) successful policies can be studied and copied.

# III. Role of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force

11. The Task Force is not an operational, implementing, or funding agency, but provides a platform and focal point for establishing strategic direction, policy coherence and coordination, and advocacy in relation to the global ICT-for-development agenda. It has the mandate to provide overall leadership in the context of the United Nations role in helping to formulate strategies for the development of ICT, putting those technologies at the service of development and forging a strategic partnership between the United Nations system, private industry, financing trusts and foundations, donors, programme countries and other relevant stakeholders. It facilitates connections among interested parties to execute programmes and projects that it wishes to promote and support.

12. Soon after its inauguration, the Task Force adopted a plan of action and a mission statement,[2] built on guidance contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Ministerial Declaration of the Economic and Social Council of 2000 and the mandate contained in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2001/7), identifying a set of objectives for the short, medium, and long term. The key areas of action are ICT policy and governance, national and regional e-strategies, human resource development and capacity-building, low-cost connectivity and access, business and entrepreneurship, and resource mobilization.

13. Since its launch, the Task Force has striven for efficiency, accountability transparency, and agility. It has built a global network of working groups and regional nodes as platforms for the implementation of its Plan of Action and for addressing critical elements of the challenge of harnessing the potential of the ICT revolution for development. It has used an open, inclusive and decentralized approach to develop stakeholder campaigns and electronic outreach, utilizing its web site and networks composed of government policy makers and representatives of the private sector, foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

14. In January 2004, in the light of the role that the Task Force is playing in the follow-up to the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society and in the preparation for the Tunis phase (November 2005), the Secretary-General extended the mandate of the Task Force to the end of 2005.

# IV. Activities and accomplishments

15. During the second year of its work, the Task Force and its subsidiary bodies welcomed new partners and collaborators, contributed to the ongoing international dialogue, made significant progress on initiatives launched in its inaugural year, and developed new initiatives to capture the benefits of ICT to further development and to support the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals.

## A. Building partnerships and networks

16. Partnerships, and the synergies they can produce, are at the core of the Task Force's mandate. The Task Force has sought to build upon and leverage ongoing work by the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force implementation teams and by other networks, such as the Health InterNetwork. In addition to facilitating productive

collaboration among its members, the Task Force has strengthened close working relationships with its numerous partners, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP), Global Knowledge Partnership, the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity, the International Trade Centre, the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie, the Multilingual Internet Names Consortium, the World Bank and regional development banks, and many other relevant organizations and initiatives.

17. In response to the emphasis placed upon partnership-building at the Geneva phase of the world Summit on the Information Society, UNFIP, a founding member of the Task Force, worked closely with other members to develop partnership projects in 2003. These included the Equal Access/UNDP digital satellite broadcasting initiative; HP's multifaceted e-inclusion initiative, bringing Internet access, literacy training, and microfinance solutions to people at the bottom of the economic pyramid; the Education Development Center's dissemination of the results of its study on power users of technology; and Microsoft's exploration of strategic collaboration opportunities with the United Nations system.

18. Through the digital diaspora networks created by the Task Force and several partners, expatriates working in the high-tech sector in North America and Europe pool their efforts and resources to jump-start ICT initiatives in their home regions of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. The networks seek to mobilize the entrepreneurial, technological and professional expertise and resources of the various diasporas to promote development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals with the aid of ICT applications. The Digital Diaspora Network for the Caribbean Community was launched in January 2003. The reports *Digital Bridge to Africa* and *Digital Bridge to the Caribbean*, both published in 2003, contain accounts of these networks.

19. In Kampala, Uganda, from 5 to 7 May 2003, UNIFEM, UNDP, the ICT Task Force, UNFIP, and the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, in cooperation with the Republic of Uganda, organized the meeting "Bridging the gender digital divide through strategic partnerships", which was attended by 150 representatives of United Nations organizations, African Governments, NGOs, the African diaspora and the private sector.

20. Building on the foundation of the existing Caribbean network and broadening its geographic scope, the Task Force organized a round table discussion on 5 September 2003 between 130 leaders of the Latin American and Caribbean diasporas on the "Digital bridge to Latin America and the Caribbean" to launch an enlarged digital diaspora initiative.

21. Unveiled jointly by the Task Force, the Governments of Canada and Ireland, and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) of the United Nations at the World Summit on the Information Society, the Global e-Policy Resource Network (ePol-NET) is a multi-stakeholder partnership designed to mobilize global efforts in support of national e-strategies for development. Consisting of virtual knowledge centres of stakeholders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors around the world, the Network brings together providers of e-strategy and e-policy information and expertise for the benefit of policy and regulatory experts, organizations and Governments in developing countries. The Task Force succeeded in bringing new international partners and regional focus to this initiative, and its African regional

network and Working Groups on ICT Policy and Governance and National and Regional e-Strategies contributed to the project.

22. The Task Force intends to continue its partnership-building work, in particular, at the forthcoming UNCTAD XI conference, to be held in Sao Paulo from 13 to 18 June 2004, at which a number of ICT-for-development partnerships that are being constructed by UNCTAD in close cooperation with Task Force members will be launched.

## B. Contributing to international dialogue and action on ICT for development

23. The Task Force sponsored or supported a number of significant international conferences and produced several new publications in the course of 2003 in order to further discussions on the ICT-for-development agenda and to catalyse new initiatives.

24. The New York-based Policy Awareness and Training in Information Technology (PATIT) series, organized by the Task Force and UNITAR, in cooperation with Intel Corporation and the Economic and Social Council's Working Group on Informatics, is intended to provide policy makers and officials from developing and less-developed countries with basic exposure to computers, Internet technologies and related policy issues. In 2003, 127 participants were trained in the five-module certificate programme, and approximately 315 participants attended three high-level seminars. The series will continue in 2004. The Global eLearning programme for senior policy makers in capitals, due to be launched in April 2004 after having been successfully piloted in 2003, will bring PATIT to policy makers around the world.

25. The Task Force co-sponsored the International Council for Caring Communities (ICCC) international conference on facilitating connectivity for older people, "Caring communities for the 21st century: imagining the possible 'age of connectivity'", held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 12 February 2003. Following the conference a publication entitled *The Age of Digital Opportunity: Connecting the Generations* was issued through a collaborative effort by ICCC, the ICT Task Force, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. It presents an assortment of viewpoints on how ICT can help meet the challenges posed by the ageing of the population. A follow-up conference on the theme "Harnessing the generations" was held on 11 February 2004, also at United Nations Headquarters.

26. In response to the Secretary-General's challenge to the Silicon Valley to bring wireless fidelity ("wi-fi" or wireless Internet) applications to the developing world to deliver cheap and fast Internet access, the ICT Task Force joined forces with the Wireless Internet Institute to host "The wireless Internet opportunity for developing countries" on 26 June 2003 in New York. The conference, attended by over 200 participants, including industry practitioners, government regulators, representatives of United Nations organizations, international development experts, academics, non-governmental organizations, and private sector technology experts, provided a productive platform for identifying and addressing the relevant issues. *The Wireless Internet Opportunity for Developing Countries*, published jointly by the ICT Task Force and the Wireless Internet Institute, provides an extensive resource base for

people who want to learn more about the wireless Internet and its possibilities in developing countries. The Wireless Internet Institute has also formulated a follow-up programme to the World Summit on the Information Society, supported by the ICT Task Force and other partners, which will be implemented during 2004 and 2005. It consists of an Arab-world seminar series, an African continent series, a municipal and local authorities series, and a series of regulatory workshops on unlicensed spectrum policy in support of universal access. Each series will be composed of several workshops or meetings leading to the launching of capacity-building programmes and the creation of self-sustaining networks, and will culminate in the presentation of reports to the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis.

27. Taking the first step to implement the mandate contained in General Assembly resolution 57/295 on information and communication technologies for development, the ICT Task Force and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) secretariat jointly organized a brainstorming session on the United Nations system ICT-for-development strategy in Geneva on 24 July 2003. In resolution 57/295 the General Assembly affirmed the need to use information and communication technologies as a strategic tool to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the development programmes and technical cooperation activities of the United Nations system. On the basis of consultation among CEB members and with inputs from the Task Force, a proposal for a system-wide strategy and an accompanying action plan will be elaborated and submitted to the Secretary-General during 2004.

28. The World Summit on the Information Society, occurring in two phases in December 2003 and November 2005, was envisioned as a unique opportunity for world leaders to agree to shape the future information society and to harness the ICT revolution for the effective achievement of internationally agreed development goals by promoting broad agreement to accord high priority to ICT in international development cooperation policies and programmes. Making the Summit process development- rather than technology-oriented, and putting the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, at the heart of the Summit Declaration and the Plan of Action was at the core of the ICT Task Force's persistent efforts during the preparatory process for the Summit. The Task Force helped to generate interest among government and business leaders in participating in the Summit and to ensure that it was perceived as a "cabinet matter" rather than something to be dealt with exclusively by information technology (IT) or telecommunication ministries. It also tapped its extensive network to involve other stakeholders from the private sector and civil society in the preparatory process.

29. The Task Force made a significant substantive contribution to the preparations for the Summit, sponsoring several regional meetings, organizing a series of global forums and side events, participating actively in events organized by other stakeholders and hosting a pavilion at the ICT for Development Platform. *Challenges and Partnerships: Opening up ICT to the World*, a publication prepared for the Summit, demonstrated the vital role of ICTs in achieving the Millennium Development Goals by showcasing some of the major deliverables and initiatives the Task Force and its members are undertaking collectively and individually, and highlighted successful strategies that can be replicated to make the information society a reality.

30. In 2003, two volumes based on the ICT Task Force's policy seminar series for ambassadors and diplomats were issued. *The Role of Information and Communication Technology in Global Development: Analyses and Policy Recommendations* assembles selected outputs from Task Force working groups examining the issues that confront the international community, Governments and local authorities as they seek to utilize ICT to improve people's lives. *Connected for Development. Information Kiosks and Sustainability* explores the preconditions and critical components for the successful use of telecommunications community centres and information kiosks for development, with the intention of sharing ideas and best practices among individuals and organizations endeavouring to provide universal access and services.

## C. Furthering ICT for development through activities and initiatives of the working groups and regional nodes

31. Soon after its launch, the Task Force developed mechanisms at the national, regional and subregional levels to facilitate a decentralized approach to cooperation on the basis of the identification of problems and gaps in existing activities related to ICT for development. Five thematic open-ended working groups have since attracted key stakeholders. Regional nodes operate in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab States, and Europe and Central Asia.

### ICT policy and governance

32. The objectives of the Working Group on ICT Policy and Governance are to promote transparency, legitimacy and accountability of international governance processes and outcomes related to ICT and to enhance developing countries' participation in ICT policy forums. To this end, the Working Group has renewed efforts on its Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) initiative, aimed at improving developing countries' involvement in both the technical and policy aspects of the work of ICANN by promoting capacity-building and raising awareness about it. As part of this initiative, the Working Group has developed a proposal to support the establishment of Africa's Regional Internet Registry (AfriNIC) that would provide for increased technical capacity as well as greater decision-making power in relation to ICANN for the African region.

33. Recognizing the vital role that e-commerce is increasingly playing in global trade, the Working Group is also spearheading efforts on a World Trade Organization (WTO) initiative aimed at assisting developing countries with e-commerce and ICT issues that may arise in the WTO Doha Development Agenda and other trade negotiations. A report prepared for the Working Group, entitled "WTO and e-Commerce — from the Uruguay Round through the Doha Development Agenda", reviews ways to address the barriers and concerns of specific relevance to developing countries regarding the trade in electronic goods and services, in order to assist them in pursuing trade negotiations to their best interests.

### National and regional e-strategies

34. The focus of e-development strategies is to enhance development through effective deployment of ICT by putting in place the conditions necessary to achieve

that end. Drawing on lessons learned from collective experiences in e-development strategies, the Task Force Working Group on National and Regional e-Strategies developed a blueprint for action outlining 10 steps to guide Governments in areas of action and potential collaboration between stakeholders at the global and national levels. This approach is designed to stimulate the deployment of national and regional e-strategies and to create synergies, linkages, cooperation and coordination among the many existing and emerging initiatives on the ground, such as those launched by the World Bank, UNDP, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), ITU and others.

35. The Working Group also supports cooperative efforts, such as the Global e-Policy Resource Network (ePol-NET), to build capacity in the area of e-strategy development by promoting access to e-policy skills, information and expertise. The Working Group promoted and supported the organization of a series of regional meetings on e-strategies between September and November 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Baku, Azerbaijan to facilitate the sharing of information and experiences on formulating and implementing e-strategies for development, to identify best practices and to initiate partnerships between countries and with development partners in the implementation of e-strategies for development. The meetings also formulated and adopted declarations outlining recommendations and priorities of the countries and regions for presentation at the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva.

**Human resources and capacity-building**

36. The Working Group on Human Resources Development and Capacity-building is collaborating closely with relevant United Nations agencies and other partners from the private and public sectors, in addition to educators and researchers in both developed and developing countries, to promote the use of ICT for capacity-building and human resource development. The Group has focused on three areas of ICT and technology policy issues: human capacity development, health and content.

37. The first area of focus, relating to human and institutional capacity development, addresses a key priority of the Group: enhancing human capacity development, knowledge creation and sharing through ICTs. The Working Group pays particular attention to overcoming disparities between men and women in educational and training opportunities and achievement. A key initiative of this Group has been the development and implementation of a United Nations Volunteer-led "University Volunteer Network under UNITeS" (United Nations Information Technology Service). The programme provides qualified, experienced volunteers from partner universities on six-month assignments to support ICT capacity-building projects in developing countries. UNITeS has mobilized funds from the Governments of Japan and Germany in support of universities from the South, so that the university volunteers within their own region can contribute their ICT skills to help bridge the digital divide and facilitate South/South cooperation.

38. The Global eSchools and Communities Initiative (GeSCI), launched in December 2003 at the first phase of the World Summit, is a joint project of the Working Group on Human Resource Development and Capacity-building and the Working Group on Low-cost Connectivity and Access. Four founding government members, the Governments of Canada, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland, and a private sector member, McKinsey & Company, are leading the initiative. GeSCI puts

information and communication technologies to use in support of education in developing countries by working in partnership with local governments, private sector companies and civil society organizations to create — at potentially 10 to 20 per cent of the cost of current approaches — effective end-to-end systems that have all the functions needed to deliver, operate and support the education solutions identified by partners based upon the needs of their students. GeSCI further aims to use the strengthened educational infrastructure for empowering local communities by facilitating their access to global and local information and knowledge flows. This will significantly strengthen communities' capacity to benefit from e-health, e-commerce, e-government, e-democracy and other empowerment tools that ICT can provide.

39. In the Working Group's focus on health, emphasis is placed on supporting the development and application of ICT to strengthen health-care systems and infrastructure to support the United Nations Secretary-General's initiative to combat HIV/AIDS and other infectious and communicable diseases. Working with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and UNDP, as well as community, state, national and international partners, the Working Group is acting to raise awareness, gain support and foster public-private partnerships to address needs identified at the national and regional levels for scaling up or introducing new initiatives and mechanisms using ICT in management and prevention efforts, research and development, treatment, distribution, monitoring, training and care. Initiatives to raise awareness included the showcasing of successful ICT-for-health programmes at the 2003 World Health Assembly in Geneva.

40. The Working Group's local content subcommittee, Local Voices, actively supports the creation of local content in relation to both education and health to empower the poor and illiterate by making the Internet and ICT relevant to their lives. It is working with software and application developers, the open source community, manufacturers and vendors to provide content and applications important to, and usable in, developing countries. The Group collaborated with representatives of the Executive Secretariat for the World Summit and of the ICT for Development Platform to present a cluster of activities relating to local content and minority languages at the Summit. To ensure follow on, a Local Voices Consortium made up of minority language speakers, businesses, performers, development workers, NGOs and other relevant parties has been set up to disseminate good practice, focus research and development, and prepare an agenda for the second phase of the Summit in Tunis 2005.

41. Other initiatives supported by this Working Group included the development of a portable Knowledge Asset Development System. This initiative is being led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which has developed an Internet-based Knowledge Asset Development System (KADS) to capture and share knowledge. UNFPA developed an open source version of this tool in collaboration with University College Cork that was successfully launched at the World Summit and is being developed into an enterprise solution to be used freely by organizations.

**Low-cost connectivity and access**

42. The Working Group on Low-Cost Connectivity and Access aims to raise awareness about, and investigate solutions for, providing increased access and

connectivity to poor people in remote communities at low cost. This includes looking at new technologies for connectivity as well as at innovative business models for sustainable access. The importance of giving priority to the African continent has been reiterated and the aim of supporting the ICT component of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) remains high on this Working Group's agenda.

43. In collaboration with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and Kista IT-University, the Working Group organized an "open access" workshop in Stockholm on 5 and 6 June 2003. The purpose of the workshop was to identify successful solutions and standards for access networks providing open universal access ("first mile"), as well as sustainable business models for operation and maintenance of such networks that could be disseminated as best practices. The workshop will become an annual event.

44. The Working Group published and presented at the World Summit "Local access and connectivity: local solutions", describing examples of innovative technical and business solutions for local access and connectivity in a number of developing countries. The Working Group also contributed to the Summit through the leading role the Group's convener took in planning one of the five main themes of the ICT for Development Platform, "Innovating for equitable access". The Working Group further contributed by supporting an exhibit at the ICT for Development Platform called "The comparative access installation". It also mobilized financial resources to enable civil society organizations, universities and innovators from developing countries to exhibit and thereby contribute to efforts to find sustainable models for establishing access for the "first mile". The Working Group also organized a side event at the platform on "open access", which explored different models for creating sustainable access in remote areas.

45. The Working Group has continued to look into the issue of the feasibility of Internet exchange points and is working with developing countries, ITU and other public and private partners to create a network for raising policy awareness on this issue and for coordinating existing initiatives.

**Business enterprise and entrepreneurship**

46. Believing that entrepreneurship has the potential to serve as an engine for innovation, job creation and wealth generation, the Working Group on Business Enterprise and Entrepreneurship is engaged in several initiatives that seek to foster entrepreneurship for sustainable social and economic development and poverty alleviation.

47. The first of three programmes that have been pursued by this Working Group is Enablis, a small, medium and microenterprise (SMME) initiative which provides assistance to small and medium-sized businesses in developing countries that use — or intend to use — technology to expand their enterprises. It was originally created by various private sector companies participating in the Digital Opportunity Task (DOT) Force and is now jointly led by Accenture, HP and Telesystem. Enablis works with other enterprise support organizations to provide a holistic set of offerings, including loan financing, business and technical support, and policy advisory services, thereby increasing small and medium-sized enterprises' chances of being successful and sustainable. A South African operating unit was launched in Cape Town in 2003, and future regional hubs are planned.

48. The Working Group's second initiative, the Global Giving Network (formerly the DevelopmentSpace Network), links pre-qualified social entrepreneurs and community-based projects in developing countries to individual donors who wish to make direct philanthropic contributions. The Network is committed to the proposition that civil society and the private sector, working in partnership with indigenous entrepreneurs and community-based organizations, can make a significant contribution to the collective creation of "public goods" and help to alleviate extreme poverty. Typical projects funded include provision of bilingual teachers for indigenous children in Peru, human waste treatment facilities in Mali, restroom facilities for schoolchildren in India and delivery of IT education in Nepal.

49. The objective of the Working Group's third initiative is to create ICT-based solutions that enable greater access to capital for microentrepreneurs and small-to-medium-sized enterprises in the developing world. Structured as a consortium composed of representatives from microfinance NGOs, IT companies and consulting firms, this project aims to connect clients efficiently with microfinance institutions and with capital markets by developing data and data-processing standards in the microfinance industry.

50. *The Arab Regional Network* seeks to coordinate, assist, facilitate, advocate and promote ICT projects for economic and social development in the Arab world. A series of national e-strategies meetings has been planned with a view to contributing to the development of ICT policies and strategies in the Arab countries. In 2003, meetings took place in Jordan and in Lebanon. The June meeting in Beirut, for example, consisted of two days of intensive presentations, debates and consultations between national and international representatives from academia, the public and private sectors, and civil society that produced a set of recommendations, which, once implemented, will provide a coherent framework by which the Government of Lebanon can create an enabling environment and provide adequate infrastructure to give ICTs the opportunity to flourish in the country. A working group for the Arab region has also been established to coordinate and follow up all matters relating to domain names in Arabic, in coordination with various Arab and international institutions and organizations, including the Multilingual Internet Names Consortium (MINC).

51. *The African Stakeholders Network* (ASN) is a network where members from different professional fields share information on major ICT-related activities and initiatives through the ASN discussion list, web sites and country profiles. Coordinated by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), ASN aims to optimize common frameworks for partnership and resource-sharing with existing ICT-for-development networks on the continent by building on current efforts and drawing on the experiences of regional and international institutions, including the Partnership for ICT in Africa (PICTA) and the Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA).

52. The annual meeting of the Steering Committee of ASN was convened on 10 and 11 May 2003 in Addis Ababa. The meeting emphasized the importance of the ASN and its Steering Committee delivering the African part of the ICT Task Force Plan of Action; sharing information on major activities and initiatives; sensitizing, involving, and mobilizing major actors; linking up with African and international initiatives and programmes; and attracting funds and investments to the ICT sector in Africa. The ASN and its Steering Committee helped develop substantively the

African contribution to the preparatory process of the World Summit on the Information Society, as well as to the Summit itself. Activities of ASN members were also showcased at the ICT for Development Platform. As part of the preparatory activities for the second phase of the Summit, in Tunis an online consultation process has been launched. The first online forum focuses on Internet governance.

53. *The Asia Regional Node*. The secretariat for the Asia Regional Network was formally established in January 2003 in Shanghai. Hosted by the Regional Cooperation Office for City Informatization of the Municipal Government of the City of Shanghai, the secretariat provides substantive and organizational support for the activities of the ICT Task Force in the region. In particular, the secretariat is organizing the fourth annual Forum on City Informatization in the Asia-Pacific Region originally planned for June 2003 but postponed to June 2004 owing to the SARS epidemic. In conjunction with the Forum, the regional secretariat will organize a meeting on Internet governance that will bring together representatives of Governments of the region, as well as of other stakeholders.

54. *The Latin America and Caribbean Node* (LACNET) focuses on articulating and organizing structures for ICT-for-development initiatives in the region. In June 2003, LACNET organized a workshop with the Presidency of the World Summit on "New models of business: the view of the private sector". The event, attended by high-ranking representatives of the business sector in the region, was aimed at allowing the ICT sector to discuss ways to foster the offering of cheaper hardware and software products for lower income markets. LACNET has also been active in the Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative, including in the selection of Bolivia to take part in its first phase. It participated in the formatting of the NetGrowth initiative together with Stanford University, the World Bank and other institutions. The network also contributed to the initial articulation of the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) of ICANN with the objective of creating a regional at-large organization in Latin America. LACNET also articulated a number of regional projects on e-commerce and small and medium-sized enterprises, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank/Multilateral Investment Fund "ICT4BUS programme".

55. Among activities planned for the coming months are the creation of a regional institute dedicated to research and development and innovation based on intensive use of ICTs, and the planning and execution of a "100 per cent digital island" project in the Caribbean with the aim of demonstrating that, with the adoption of fixed wireless systems, full connectivity is feasible. Possible cooperation schemes have been discussed, with encouraging results, with several private companies and a meeting on Internet governance will be organized for stakeholders in the region, in cooperation with ITU, ICANN, UNESCO and others.

56. *The Europe and Central Asia Regional Network's* Moscow node, in close cooperation with its Geneva node, was actively involved in the organization of the international conference "Partnership networks as tools to enhance information society and knowledge economy" (Moscow, December 2002). This event brought together 100 decision makers and high-level experts from 19 countries representing government, business, civil society, the research and education community, the mass media, national and international associations, and international organizations including the World Bank, UNDP, and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

The conference materials have been broadly disseminated in Commonwealth of Independent States and European countries.

57. The Moscow node actively promotes "knowledge economy" development in Russia and CIS countries. At a conference held in Vilnius, Lithuania, in August 2003, members of the node presented a report on main indicators for a knowledge economy readiness assessment, which could form a basis for a system of indicators for preparing national knowledge economy reports for Europe and Central Asia.

58. As the working groups and regional nodes continue to develop and carry out their activities, the Task Force places great value on synthesizing and evaluating the results to draw out best practices and lessons learned and to ensure close alignment of the activities of the working groups and regional nodes with the Millennium Development Goals.

## V. Assessment, challenges and the way ahead

59. Review of the Task Force's activities during the past two years proves its utility and shows both the potential and limitations of such a mechanism. Although it is constrained by limited resources and its dependency on sovereign Governments actively cooperating and taking ultimate responsibility for their national ICT and development environments, the ICT Task Force has clearly demonstrated its ability to contribute to the development agenda, to build capacity among policy makers to participate actively in discussion on ICTs, to identify gaps in programmes or projects as well as opportunities for synergy among interested parties, and to stimulate action or coordinate collaboration as appropriate. It has helped develop new models of leadership and collaboration to advance the global effort to bridge the digital divide and foster digital opportunity. In effect, the body has created the organizational infrastructure for using ICTs to address the eradication of endemic poverty and to create new opportunities for people around the world. Developing countries, in particular African countries and least developed countries, remain the major focus of its efforts.

60. The challenges that the Task Force faces are known. The global environment is extremely dynamic and complex, requiring an ability to respond effectively to change. Financial resources are only slowly becoming available again after a significant contraction. Ultimately, the future success of ICT for development depends on the commitment of Governments to good governance, the protection of human rights, sound economic policies and the fight against corruption and for the rule of law, as well as the creation of a conducive and productive policy and institutional environment for investment in ICT for development. The effectiveness of the Task Force in reaching its goals is also contingent on the sustained involvement of key institutions and the actors engaged in its work. Bridging the digital divide and providing access for all are at the heart of the ICT-for-development agenda and involve complex issues such as infrastructure, technological innovation, investment, education and training, and content creation. The integration of ICT policy and strategy with the overall national development strategy is crucial in this regard.

61. Members of the Task Force and its Bureau reviewed and assessed the experience acquired and the lessons learned during 2003. On the basis of these assessments, a business plan for 2004 was developed to focus Task Force activities.

The plan stresses that activities must realistically reflect the Task Force's capacity. The Task Force, therefore, should concentrate on those activities in which it has a proven record of achievement — specifically, linking ICT and internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration; building multi-stakeholder partnerships; addressing ICT policy and governance; and contributing to the creation of an enabling environment — rather than expanding into any qualitatively new field of activity.

62. In this context, five priority activity tracks on which to focus the ICT Task Force's efforts have been identified in the business plan.

**Monitoring and benchmarking progress on the World Summit on the Information Society implementation**

63. The ICT Task Force has a vital role in the period between the two phases of the World Summit. The multi-stakeholder character of the Task Force, with its active global system of subsidiary bodies and networks, position it uniquely for supporting the critical follow-up to the Summit decisions. Its potential to add value is greatly facilitated by the extension of its mandate until December 2005. The Task Force is already implementing, in accordance with the mandate and Plan of Action, a number of activities that may be relevant to the inter-phase work that the World Summit may decide to undertake, including facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building in ICT for development.

64. Led by Industry Canada, the Task Force's work in developing a system of indicators and benchmarks that would provide a basis for assessing the impact of ICT on the achievement of internationally agreed development goals builds on efforts being pursued by the World Economic Forum, the World Bank and UNDP, and by the Secretary-General's Millennium Project Task Force 10 on Science, Technology and Innovation, with which the Task Force has been working closely. The Task Force presented a working document, "Tools for development: using information and communications technology to achieve the Millennium Development Goals", at its 5th meeting and in ICT for Development Platform workshops at the World Summit in Geneva. A more analytical piece is planned for 2004 on the ICT-for-development agenda, in addition to a collection of examples, success stories and case studies that will illustrate the role of ICTs in meeting the development challenge.

**Promoting a dialogue on Internet governance and other policy issues**

65. The Task Force is actively contributing on the key issues emerging from the Geneva phase of the World Summit, in particular the issues relating to Internet governance. Building on its recognized strengths, the Task Force has continued to work on this topic by, among other things, providing its multi-stakeholder platform to bring relevant actors together in a productive dialogue on Internet governance and other policy issues created by the IT revolution. This work builds on its activities in the areas of ICT policy and governance, and e-strategies. The objective is for the Task Force to contribute to the larger international debate on this crucial set of issues, with a view to helping develop a solid foundation for a meaningful consensual debate and thus contributing to the World Summit process.

**Supporting an enabling environment**

66. The recent first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva endorsed the decisive role of an enabling environment in the propagation of ICTs and their consequent impact on development. The ICT Task Force works with other stakeholders to facilitate the identification of best practices, which constitute the road map towards favourable conditions for information society development. In collaboration with various partners, including from the private sector, the Task Force will promote capacity-building in ICT policy-making in developing countries and countries with economies in transition through building activities complementary to those to be supported in the period 2004-2006 through the Development Account project that will be led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations. The Task Force will support the establishment of networks of policy makers and practitioners and facilitate online training.

**Ongoing activities**

67. In its third and fourth years of operation, the ICT Task Force will strive to bring its initiatives to scale where possible. It is planned to implement the Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative launched at the World Summit in a first group of countries (India, Bolivia, Ghana and Namibia) in 2004, with the support of a dedicated secretariat in Dublin, Ireland. It is expected that the initiative will be implemented in a second group of countries in 2006. The Task Force will continue to play a role in directing policy and linking the initiative to other activities and actors to ensure coherence.

68. The Task Force will be a vital partner to CEB in developing an ICT strategy for the United Nations system, as plans to develop approaches for a broad coherent and effective strategy proceed. The series on Policy Awareness and Training in Information Technology will continue in 2004 and will offer its global e-learning programme for senior policy makers in capitals beginning in April. The Wireless Internet Institute's ambitious World Summit programme including a training component, supported by the ICT Task Force and other partners, will unfold throughout 2004 and 2005. The Task Force will encourage the digital diaspora networks to build upon their efforts to develop and implement tangible initiatives to capture and focus the desire and determination of the Latin American, Caribbean and African diasporas to make positive contributions to their home regions.

**Strengthening supporting activities**

69. The basis of the ICT Task Force's effectiveness is its ability to bring influential stakeholders together to address common concerns. In order to attract the relevant players, its activities must be properly promoted and disseminated to reach the appropriate audiences. The Task Force has undertaken significant efforts to raise awareness and mobilize support for the ICT-for-development agenda and to contact civil society by organizing conferences and workshops, producing publications and placing articles in journals. The Task Force has also promoted its work at major international events, including most recently the World Summit on the Information Society, and intends to continue to do so. Nevertheless, the promotion and outreach activities could be reinvigorated with enhanced commitment from stakeholders.

70. Fund-raising is directly affected by the effectiveness of the Task Force's promotion and outreach. In order to ensure successful implementation of the

mandate, Plan of Action and decisions taken by the meetings of the Task Force, as well as effective secretarial support to Task Force activities and events, it is imperative to ensure a stable, sustainable and predictable resource base. The Task Force is evaluating the feasibility of adding a full-time development officer to the secretariat to provide a systematic and effective outreach and fund-raising effort.

## VI. Conclusion

71. **A new paradigm of global society is evolving that is based on networking in pursuit of common interests and on the emergence of non-hierarchical, multilateral, and multi-stakeholder approaches. ICTs are the nerve system of this new paradigm. They are used to link the external environment and the functioning of internal systems, to transfer impulses for action and to provide feedback. The recent WSIS declared the need to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society.**

72. **However, at present the full potential of ICT in servicing and driving the new paradigm is far from being adequately harnessed. It needs to be utilized much more efficiently and fully to promote development. The ICT Task Force, by creating a worldwide network of stakeholders in ICT for development, is well positioned to contribute to making the new global paradigm work for development.**

73. **The networks, partnerships and initiatives incubated by the Task Force have helped create a new momentum towards greater use of ICT for achieving the internationally agreed development goals. The Task Force is also well placed to contribute to the follow-up to the Geneva phase and preparations for the Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. The implementation of the World Summit Programme of Action and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals will, however, require sustained and long-term efforts. The Task Force embodies the idea of working together in creative and innovative ways. The challenge will be to build on this successful model for sustained results over the medium to long term.**

*Notes*

[1] This section has been contributed by the International Telecommunication Unit.

[2] See the web site of the Task Force http://www.unicttaskforce.org for these documents.